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1. **FOREWORD**

The purpose of this work is to present the authentic teachings of Islam. There is only one Islam, and only one example of how it is to be lived - that of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him).[1] Our intention is to provide a basic overview of the main tenets as given in the Qur'ān and by the example set by the Prophet. We also attempt to address some commonly asked questions about Islam.

Despite the fact that over one-fifth of the world's population is Muslim, Islam is often misunderstood and misrepresented in contemporary Western society. It is hoped that this work will help shed light on Islam, which was divinely communicated to Muhammad (Peace be upon him), and dispel any commonly held misconceptions that ignite prejudice and hatred.

We write this in the hope that people of all faiths will join us in making this a world of tolerance, kindness, understanding, and peace.

2. **WHAT IS ISLAM?**

The Arabic word "Islam" literally means **"submission."** Islam, as a faith, means total and sincere submission to God. Such submission to God brings peace and tranquility.

The name Islam[2] is universal in its meaning. Islam is not named after a tribe of people or after an individual, as Judaism is named after the Tribe of Judah, Christianity is named after Christ, and Buddhism is named after Buddha. Islam was not a name chosen by human beings; it was divinely communicated from God. Islam is a complete way of life, implying a total submission to God. One who submits his or her will to God, voluntarily,[3] is called a Muslim. It was not Muhammad but Adam (Peace be upon them) who first brought Islam to humanity. Then, each Prophet and Messenger (Peace be upon them) came to exhort the people to clear understanding of God's Commandment and offered teachings pertinent to that time, until finally the Prophet Muhammad came with the Last Testament.

Allah is the proper Name of the One[4] True God who Created the heavens and the earth. It should be mentioned that Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians call God by the Name Allah.

3. **MONOTHEISM**

The concept of monotheism (known as *tawheed* in Arabic) is the single most important concept in Islam. Monotheism is similar to the first of the Ten Commandments, and everything in Islam is built upon it. Islam calls humanity to

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1. It is Islamic tradition to offer blessings of peace to all the Prophets and Messengers of God. Not to do so when they are named would be considered a withholding of respect.

2. Some Muslims are uncomfortable calling Islam a "religion," as Islam is not an institutionalized faith. In Arabic Islam is referred to as a *Deen,* "Way of life." This is the same as early Christians who also called their faith "The Way."

3. Voluntarily in this sense means more than not being coerced. It means submitting to God without ulterior motives or reservations, and with genuine wholeheartedness.

4. The additional capitalization found throughout this text reflects respect for God and sets His Divine Attributes apart from all creation.

worship the One and only true God. No act of worship or devotion has any meaning or value if this concept is in any way compromised.

Due to its importance, the concept of monotheism must be properly understood. Everything that we know with regard to the Divine Unity of God must be cherished. For ease of discussion, monotheism can be looked at from the following three perspectives:

1. The **Oneness of God** in His Lordship
2. The Devotion of All Worship to The **One God Alone**
3. The Uniqueness and **Oneness of God** in His Names and Attributes

This breakdown is by no means the only way to approach the subject of God's Unity, but it allows the topic to be easily analyzed and discussed.

4. THE ONENESS OF GOD IN HIS LORDSHIP

The Oneness of God in His Lordship means that God Has Absolute Mastery over the universe. **He alone is the Creator of all things.** He alone Causes everything to happen. He is the One Who Provides all sustenance and Who Determines life and death. He is All-Powerful, absolutely Perfect, free from any defect. No one shares in His Dominion. None can resist His Decree. He is the One Who Created each of us from a single cell and Made us into what we are. He is the One Who Created billions of galaxies and every electron, neutron, and quark contained within them, Keeping all that exists and all the laws of nature in perfect measure. Not a leaf falls from a tree without His Permission and Account.

He is far Greater than our imagination. He is so Powerful that for anything to be Created He simply Says, **"Be,"** and it is. He Created time, space, and all the known and unknown worlds, yet He is not part of any of them. Most faiths recognize that the Creator of the universe is One, without partner. Islam includes the knowledge that God is not a part of His creation and none of His creation shares in His Power.

To believe that any of God's creation shares in any of His Power or Attributes would be considered polytheism and disbelief. Examples of such false beliefs would be to consider that fortune tellers and astrologers can predict the future; God Says only He Has Knowledge of the future. Only the Divine can bring Divine help! No being has the ability to give Divine help or Divine guidance. Believing good luck charms and talismans have Divine power is a form of polytheism. These concepts are renounced in Islam.

5. THE DEVOTION OF ALL WORSHIP TO THE ONE GOD ALONE

Only God is to be worshipped. This was proclaimed by all the Prophets and Messengers of Islam who were Sent by God throughout the ages and is the core belief of Islam. God Tells us that the purpose of the creation of mankind is to worship Him alone. The purpose of Islam is to call people away from the worship of creation and to direct them toward the worship of the Creator only.

This is where Islam differs from other religions. Though most religions teach that there is a Creator Who Created all that exists, they are rarely free of some form of polytheism (idolatry) with respect to worship. These religions either call on their adherents to worship other beings besides God as gods (though usually placing these

other gods on a lower level than the God Who is the Creator), or they demand that their adherents call on other beings as intercessors between them and God.

All the Prophets and Messengers of God, from Adam to Muhammad (Peace be upon them all), called people to worship God alone with neither partner nor intermediary. This is the purest, simplest, most natural faith. Islam rejects and refutes the notion held by cultural anthropologists that the early religion of human beings was polytheism, which gradually evolved into monotheism. In fact, the truth is just the opposite – human cultures descended into idolatry during the gaps between the many Messengers of God. Subsequent Messengers were Commissioned by God to bring people BACK to monotheism.

The authentic, natural religion of humanity is to worship God alone. Satan, on the other hand, does his utmost to get people to turn away from monotheism, inviting man to the worship of other beings. Most of mankind seem to have a tendency to focus their devotion on something they can visualize, something imaginable, even though they have an instinctive knowledge that the Creator of the universe is far greater than their imaginations. Throughout human history, God Sent Prophets and Messengers to call the people back to the worship of the One True God, and repeatedly, people deviated to the worship of created beings (idolatry and polytheism).

God Created human beings to worship Him alone. The greatest possible sin is to worship any other than God, even if the worshipper intends to get nearer to God by offering devotions to another being. God does not need intercessors or intermediaries. He Hears all of our prayers and Has Complete Knowledge of everything that happens.

At the same time, God does not need our worship, but He Says that it is pleasing to Him. He is completely Independent of all things. All creation is dependent upon Him. If every person in the world were to come together to worship only God, it would not benefit God in the least. It would not add an atom's weight to His Dominion. Conversely, if all creation abandoned the worship of God, it would not decrease His Dominion in the least. By worshipping God, we benefit our own souls and fulfill the noble purpose for which we were Created. God Has no needs; He is The Eternal, The Absolute.

Worship is not just traditional religious ceremonies and practices. The concept of worship is inclusive. Changing a diaper or a tire or picking up a piece of glass from the sidewalk all can be forms of worship if they are done to please God. If any sort of gain—wealth, job, power, recognition—becomes more important than pleasing God, even that is a form of polytheism.

6. THE UNIQUENESS AND ONENESS OF GOD IN HIS NAMES AND ATTRIBUTES

The Uniqueness and Oneness of God in His Names and Attributes indicates that God does not **Share** in the attributes of created beings, nor do they **share** in any of His. God is Unique in every way. He Cannot be limited in any way, for He is the Creator of everything. God The Most High Says, "God! None is Worthy of worship but He, The Ever Living, The One Who Sustains and Protects all that exists. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. Who is he that can intercede with Him except with His Permission? He Knows what happens to them [His creatures] in this world, and what will happen to

them in the Hereafter. And they will never encompass anything of His Knowledge except that which He Wills. His *Kursi* [Throne] extends over the heavens and the earth, and He Feels no fatigue in Guarding and Preserving them and He is the Most High, The Supreme." [Qur'ān 2:255]

It is forbidden in Islam to attribute to God characteristics of His creation. The only attributes that are permitted to be ascribed to God are the ones He Revealed Himself in the Qur'ān or those used by the Prophet (Peace be upon him) to describe Him. Many of God's Names and Attributes seem to have equivalents on the human level, but this is only a reflection of human language. God's Attributes, like God Himself, are unlike anything in our experience. For instance, God Has Divine Knowledge. Man has knowledge. God's Knowledge, though, is nothing at all like the knowledge of human beings. God's Knowledge Is Unlimited, Timeless, and Unchanging. It is neither learned nor acquired. It Encompasses all things without experiencing increase or decrease. Human knowledge, on the other hand, is acquired and limited. It is constantly changing, increasing and decreasing, and subject to forgetfulness and error.

God Has Divine Will. The human being also has a will. God's Will always Comes to pass. Like His Divine Knowledge, It Is Timeless and Unchanging, Encompassing all things that God Wants to come to pass in creation, past, present, and future. Human will, on the other hand, is merely an intention, a desire. It can only come to pass if God Wills it to happen.

Human attributes cannot be ascribed to God. All human attributes are limited. He has no gender, deficiency, or weakness.[5] It is a form of polytheism to ascribe to God attributes of created things. It is likewise a form of polytheism to ascribe to created things Attributes that belong to God alone. For instance, anyone who believes that any other than God is All-Knowledgeable or All-Powerful has committed the sin of polytheism. "Blessed be the name of your Lord, full of Majesty, Bounty, and Honor." [Qur'ān 55:78]

7. **THE SIX ARTICLES OF FAITH**

There are certain things that every Muslim must believe. A person who doubts any of these things cannot be considered a Muslim. These articles of faith are:

1. Belief in God
2. Belief in His Angels
3. Belief in His Books
4. Belief in His Prophets and Messengers
5. Belief in the Day of Judgment
6. Belief in God's Divine Decree

8. **BELIEF IN GOD**

Islam emphasizes that God is One, The Creator of all that exists, and He is Unique in every way. Only God Has the right to be worshipped.

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5. God is beyond the human attribute of gender. Here we have used the pronoun "He" only because there is no gender-neutral pronoun in Semitic languages, and it follows the conventions of English usage. When the royal "We" is used in the Qur'ān to refer to God, it is for respect and in no way implies plurality.

9. **BELIEF IN HIS ANGELS**

The angels are creations of God. God Created them from light. They are powerful and always do precisely as they are Commanded by God.

God has Revealed to us the names and the duties of some of the angels. A Muslim must believe in the existence of angels. Gabriel and Michael are among the angels mentioned in the Qur'ān. For instance, it is Gabriel's duty to take God's Revelation to the Prophets and Messengers (Peace be upon them).

10. **BELIEF IN HIS BOOKS**

Muslims believe in all of the original scriptures Revealed by God to His different Messengers (Peace be upon them). A Muslim must believe in every scripture Mentioned by God in the Qur'ān. God Revealed them, and they are the actual Word of God. The scriptures that God Mentions in the Qur'ān are as follows:

1. The original **Scrolls** as revealed to Abraham
2. The original **Torah** as revealed to Moses
3. The original **Psalms** as revealed to David
4. The original **Injeel** (*Gospel of Jesus)* as revealed to Jesus[6]
5. The **Qur'ān** as revealed to Muhammad (which is still available in its original form) (Peace be upon them all)

Muslims do not consider the Bible that is presently in circulation in various editions and versions to be an accurate representation of the older scriptures that were revealed before the Qur'ān. According to the Qur'ān, people have distorted these scriptures for their own worldly gain. What remains of them is a mixture of original divine text, man-made interpretation, and contamination (falsehood). Although Muslims believe in all the previous books, they only live and are guided by the Qur'ān and the authentic traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him).

11. **BELIEF IN HIS PROPHETS AND MESSENGERS**

The Prophets and Messengers were individuals who received Revelation from God and conveyed it to mankind. They were Sent to humanity to return people to monotheism and to guide them to the path of salvation. None of the Prophets and Messengers share in any part of God's Divinity. They were merely human beings. It is forbidden for a Muslim to worship them or to use them as a conduit to God. A Muslim should never invoke them, make supplications to them, or seek God's Mercy and Forgiveness through them. All such acts are polytheistic, and anyone who engages in them is outside the fold of Islam as taught by every single Messenger.

Throughout the ages, God Sent Prophets to nations all over the world. A Muslim must believe in all of the Prophets and Messengers Sent by God. God has Mentioned some of them in the Qur'ān. Among those who have been mentioned by name[7] are Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (Peace be upon them all).

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6. The different gospels in today's Bible were written after the time of Jesus (Peace be upon him) by other authors. The Injeel mentioned in the Qur'ān refers only to the revelations which came through Jesus, son of Mary (Peace be upon him).

7. The Prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān are: Elisha, Job, David, Dhul-Kifl, Aaron, Hud, Abraham, Idris, Elias, Jesus, Isaac, Ishmael, Lot, Moses, Noah, Salih, Shuaib, Solomon, Ezra, Jacob, John, Jonah, Joseph, Zachariya, and Muhammad (Peace be upon them all).

All the Prophets and Messengers of God brought the teachings of Islam. Throughout history, all monotheistic people who submitted to the Will of God and followed the revealed teachings of the Prophets and Messengers of God, would be considered Muslims. For example, when Moses (Peace be upon him) came and proclaimed his Prophethood, anyone who truly followed him in monotheism was Muslim. Likewise, when Jesus (Peace be upon him) came and declared his Prophethood with clear signs and miracles, it was obligatory for everyone to accept him unconditionally if they were to be considered Muslims. All those who rejected him became disbelievers by that rejection. The rejection of any of God's Messengers disqualifies one as Muslim. All the Prophets and Messengers called upon humanity to worship The Creator alone without ascribing to Him any partner, and they all submitted completely to God, which is Islam.

The Prophets, from Adam to Muhammad (Peace be upon them), were all brothers in faith. They all called people to the same truth. Different Messengers came with different sets of laws that God Sent through them to guide and govern the people, but the essence of their teachings was the same. They all called people away from the worship of created things to the worship of The Creator.

Muslims are required to love and respect all of the Prophets and Messengers of God (Peace be upon them). If a person rejects or dislikes any one of them, that person is not a believer.

In Islam, Muhammad (Peace be upon him) has the distinction of being God's final Messenger and the seal of the Prophets. This is because God Completed His Revelations to mankind and Perfectly Preserved them forever in the Qur'ān, and because His final Prophet and Messenger was able to lead an exemplary life for the twenty-three years of his Prophethood and set clear guidelines for all the generations to follow. God Says in the Qur'an that no Prophet or Messenger will come after him. This is the reason Muhammad (Peace be upon him) is known as the seal of the Prophets.[8] This means that the manifestation of the Divine law that is embodied in the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) is for all of humanity until the Day of Resurrection (Day of Judgment). To be a believer, it is obligatory to believe in Muhammad (Peace be upon him) and the laws that have been revealed through him, as well as in all the Prophets and Messengers of God who came before. Muhammad and the Prophets and Messengers before him (Peace be upon them) also had to believe in and obey Almighty God. Although Muslims believe in all the Prophets and Messengers of God, they are to follow and emulate only the lifestyle of Muhammad, the final Prophet and Messenger (Peace be upon him).

12. BELIEF IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

All Muslims must believe, without doubt, in the Day of Judgment and the physical resurrection when the body will be recreated and the soul will be reunited with the body by God's Unlimited and Amazing Power. Just as God Created us the first time, He is surely Able to Bring us forth from death to stand in Perfect Judgment before

8. Some Muslims refer to the following verses as the fortelling of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him): Deut. 18:15, 18:18; John 1:19-21, 14:16, 14:17, 15:26, 16:7-8, 16:12-13.

Him. From the Day of Judgment, death will be no longer; our existence will be forever. The Day of Judgment is when each and every individual will stand before The Creator and be Questioned about his or her deeds. On that climactic day, we will each see in detail the results of even the smallest good and the smallest evil we have set forth in this life. On this day, lying and deception will be impossible. The ultimate reward is Paradise and the penalty is Hell. Heaven and Hell are literal places of existence, not a figment of imagination.

God Describes Paradise as a fantastic place of pleasure, filled with amazing eternal gardens with rivers flowing beneath. No hot or cold, no disease or fatigue, no evil will exist. God Will Remove disease from the heart and body of mankind, and everything one wishes for will be Granted. It will be said to those who enter Paradise, "This Paradise you have inherited as a result of God's Mercy and your good deeds."

God Describes Hell as an eternally horrible place, beyond imagination, a fire whose fuel is men and stone. When stern angels place people in Hell, they will say, "Taste of that which you used to deny." (Being a Muslim does not assure Paradise unless he or she dies in a state of Islam - submission.) We believe God is Most Compassionate, Most Merciful; however, He is Severe in His Punishment.

God's Infinite Justice is Absolute and Perfect. On the Day of Judgment, all deeds will be revealed, and everyone will be justly treated. We will not enter Paradise because of our deeds alone, but by God's Majesty and Unlimited Grace.

13. **BELIEF IN DIVINE DECREE**

God, in His Timelessness, Knows everything that goes on in His creation and when it occurs. From the perspective of temporal beings like us, this means that God Knows everything that happened in the past through His All-Encompassing Knowledge, everything that is now taking place by His Supreme Power, and everything that will happen in the future by His Infinite Wisdom. God's Divine Knowledge is Perfect. He Knows all, and all that He Knows will come to pass.

God Has Absolute Sovereignty over His creation. Everything that exists within His creation and every event that occurs is a direct result of His Creating it. Nothing happens in creation except by His Power, His Will, and His Knowledge.

14. **THE FREE WILL OF THE HUMAN BEING**

An important aspect of Islam is that every human being has the free will to choose between right and wrong. God has Honored humanity with this great gift. It carries grave responsibility, and, on the Day of Judgment, we will be accountable for our use of this gift.

Human free will does not in any way contradict the fact that God Knows everything that will ever occur in creation. Someone might ask: "If God Knows that I am going to commit a sin tomorrow, then it is unavoidable that I do so because God's Knowledge is Infallible and what God Knows will come to pass." God's Knowledge of this person's decision does not mean that he or she is being forced to make that decision.

Human free will does not in any way contradict God's Absolute Sovereignty over everything in creation. Nor does it contradict the fact that nothing happens in creation except what God Wills. Some might say, "Therefore, I have no free will. My free will

is but an illusion." God Created within each of us the ability to formulate an intention. God Wants us to be able to make our own choices. When a person makes a choice, God, by His Divine Will, Creates the actions and circumstances that allow the person's intention to be carried out. It is God's Will that human beings have free will. God is not always Pleased with the decisions people make, but He Wants them to be able to make these decisions from their own free choice. An example is a person's will to do a good deed. The good deed may never be carried out, but God May Reward the person for his or her intention to do a good deed. If the good deed comes to pass, God's Will Allowed it to take place and God Will Reward for both intent and action. God may reward you for good deeds willed but not carried out; He does not Punish for bad intent not acted upon. God Allows us choice (which we often squander).

15. **THERE IS NO COMPULSION IN RELIGION**

It follows from this emphasis on free will that Islam can only be accepted by free choice. The purpose of human life is to **worship God of one's own free will.** Therefore, matters of faith only have value if they are accepted on the basis of choice. If a person is coerced into accepting any religion, that acceptance is false and has no value. God Says: "**There is no compulsion in religion**. Truth stands out clear from error: whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that never breaks. And God Hears and Knows all things." [Qur'ān 2: 256]

16. **THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM**

There are five obligatory acts of worship that every Muslim must dutifully carry out. Failure to do so is a grave sin. The edifice of Islam rests upon these pillars. One cannot be considered a Muslim if he or she denies that any one of these acts is obligatory.

The five obligations of Muslims are:

1. The Declaration of Faith, to "**Testify that there is no deity except God, and that Muhammad is His Messenger"**, *"Shahada"*
2. To **Pray** five times a day, *"Salat"*
3. To Pay the yearly **Alms,** *"Zakat"*
4. To **Fast** during the month of Ramadhan, *"Sawm"*
5. To Make a **pilgrimage** to Makka, *"Hajj"*

17. **THE DECLARATION OF FAITH** *(SHAHADA)*

It is obligatory for every person intending to enter Islam to believe and to "**Testify that there is no deity except God, and that Muhammad is His Messenger."** With this simple, important, and powerful declaration, a person is considered a Muslim. There is no initiation into the fold of Islam.

The concepts within the testimony of faith can be explained by analyzing each of three parts within the testimony. The first part "**No deity**…" is a negation of polytheism.[9] **It is a disclaimer to the existence of any deity except God, or any**

9. This negation means that nothing is to be worshipped except God, nothing has divinity except God, none share the attributes of God, and none can be a creator or sustainer of creation except God Who is without equal or partner.

entity that shares in any of the divine attributes of God. The second part "…**except God**" is an affirmation of monotheism: **God is the only One worthy of worship**.

"Muhammad is God's Messenger" is the third part within the testimony of faith. It is an affirmation of the Prophethood of Muhammad (Peace be upon him) as the final Prophet and Messenger of God.[10] This requires the unconditional acceptance of the Qur'ān and the authentic sayings and traditions of Muhammad (Peace be upon him) (See topic 23). This law supersedes all previously revealed laws, texts, and scriptures.

By believing and saying the testimony of faith, a person rejects all false objects of worship and asserts that God is the only One to be worshipped. God is without equal or partner. God Promises that once a person affirms and sincerely **"Testify that there is no deity except God, and that Muhammad is His Messenger,"** all of their previous sins are forgiven and turned into good deeds. Their previous good deeds may also be Rewarded by God.

18. PRAYING FIVE TIMES A DAY *(SALAT)*

It is required for every Muslim to perform five obligatory prayers a day. A Muslim turns toward Makka (Mecca) when performing these prayers, facing the first house ever built for the worship of One God. This house is called the Ka`bah, located in Makka, in contemporary Saudi Arabia. It was erected by Abraham and his son Ishmael upon foundations set by Adam (Peace be upon them). It was originally established by Adam, and then rebuilt by Abraham and his son Ishmael (Peace be upon them). It was always dedicated to the worship of only One God.

One must remember that in Islam we do not have any sacred relics or symbols. We are simply worshipping God while facing the Ka`bah; we are not worshipping the Ka`bah. Facing the Ka`bah to pray unites the worshippers in their prayer to the One God. Anyone who worships the Ka`bah or any other creation would be considered an idol worshipper. To put it plainly, the building materials that make up this house are no more sacred than any other building materials.

These prayers take place throughout the day and night and are a constant reminder of a person's duty and submission to God. It is a chance to turn to God in worship, to give thanks, to ask for forgiveness, and to ask for His Guidance and Mercy.

A Muslim may voluntarily perform prayer more often. Prayer, in the general sense of supplication, can be offered at practically any time or place.

19. PAYING THE YEARLY ALMS *(ZAKAT)*

It is a religious duty for every Muslim to give a portion of his or her wealth to the needy each year. These alms are called *Zakāt* in Arabic which literally means purification. Paying these alms is a way for people to purify the ethically gained wealth that God has Bestowed upon them. In addition, it is a means to distribute wealth

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10. One may ask, "If Islam teaches that all the Prophets and Messengers are equal then why does the testimony of faith only affirm the Prophethood of Muhammad without mentioning other Prophets?" It must be understood that anyone who affirms the Prophethood of Muhammad (Peace be upon him) must affirm the Prophethood of all the Prophets and Messengers of God that came before him. If one were to testify, for example, that, "there is no deity except God, and Moses is the Messenger of God," this does not necessitate the person's acceptance of the Prophets and Messengers that followed Moses such as Jesus or Muhammad (Peace be upon them).

throughout society. Alms also purify the soul of the giver, reducing greed and strengthening compassion and generosity amongst humanity.

The amount of these alms is 2 ½% of unused wealth calculated annually.

20. **FASTING DURING RAMADHAN** *(SAWM)*

A Muslim must fast during the lunar month of Ramadhan. This month is significant because the first revelations of the Qur'ān to Muhammad (Peace be upon him) occurred during this month. Since the lunar calendar is eleven days shorter than the solar calendar, the month of Ramadhan gradually passes through all seasons of the year. Fasting begins at dawn and ends at sunset, local time. During daylight hours, a fasting person must abstain from food, drink, and marital sexual intercourse.[11] These activities are permissible from sunset to the following dawn. Fasting teaches self-control and patience. Like prayer, it is a way of turning to God in sincere worship.

21. **MAKING A PILGRIMAGE TO MAKKA** *(HAJJ)*

Every Muslim is to make the pilgrimage to the "House of God," Ka`bah in Makka, once in a lifetime if he or she has the means to do so. Muslims from all over the world gather together for the purpose of worshipping and pleasing God alone.

The pilgrimage to Makka compels the pilgrims to break down racial, economic, and social barriers that their societies may still be plagued with. It also induces the pilgrim to practice patience, self-restraint, and piety.

Each of these obligatory acts of worship keeps the remembrance of God alive and reminds all Muslims that from God we come and to God we will all return.

22. **THE QUR'ĀN**

The Qur'ān is the final, infallible, and direct Word of God brought down by the angel Gabriel[12] (often referred to as the holy spirit) and firmly implanted into the heart of His final Messenger Muhammad (Peace be upon him). The Qur'ān was learned and memorized by his companions, and passed down to us via meticulous oral (primary) and written (secondary) preservation through the centuries.

The books that came before the Qur'ān, through God's Prophets and Messengers (Peace be upon them), were also Sent by God. The Qur'ān is unique in a number of ways. God has Perfectly Preserved the Qur'ān and Guaranteed it from corruption until the end of time. The Qur'ān is regarded, not just by Muslims but also by historians of religion, as the most authentic holy text among the world's religions.[13] None of the other revealed books have reached us in their original form. Some of them, like the scrolls that were revealed through Abraham (Peace be upon him), have not reached us at all. Over the course of time, parts of other scriptures were rewritten and some parts

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11. Islam forbids any premarital sexual relationships.

12. It is taught in Islam that the holy spirit is the angel Gabriel and should not be worshipped. (Belief in the trinity clearly contradicts the core principle of the Islamic faith—monotheism.)

13. **a**.) Joseph van Ess, "Muhammad and the Qur'ān: Prophecy and Revelation" in Christianity and the World Religions: Paths to Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, edited by Hans Kung (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1986). **b**.) Michael Sells, Approaching the Qur'ān: The Early Revelations (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 1999). **c**.) John Burton, The Collection of the Qur'ān (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981).

removed, contaminating their message. These books were not preserved because God Did not Take it upon Himself to Preserve them.

God Did not Allow this to happen to the Qur'ān since it is His **final book** for all of humanity until the Day of Judgment. No new Prophet or Messenger is going to be Sent. If the Qur'ān were corruptible, God's Message would be lost to humanity for all time. For this reason, God Did Not Entrust human beings with preserving the Qur'ān.[14]

Divine Preservation of the earlier scriptures was not as critical because God Continued to Send a succession of Prophets and Messengers to the people. The law as embodied in these older scriptures was not in its final complete form. By God's Order, Jesus (Peace be upon him) came with modifications to the law, for instance, making lawful some things that had previously been unlawful without making any changes to the core concept of monotheism.

Another unique quality of the Qur'ān is that it is an amazing miracle in and of itself. A miracle is a phenomenon that goes against the natural order of things and clearly demonstrates the Direct Intervention of God Almighty.

All the Prophets and Messengers brought miracles from God that clearly demonstrated the truthfulness of their claim to Prophethood. Abraham (Peace be upon him) survived being thrown into a blazing fire without being harmed. Moses (Peace be upon him) raised his staff and the Red Sea parted for him by God's Mercy. Jesus (Peace be upon him), son of Mary, touched the dead and terminally ill and restored them to full health by the permission of God. All of these miracles revealed the legitimacy and validity of the Prophets and Messengers, but these miracles could only be witnessed by the people who were actually there at that time.

While the Prophethood of Muhammad (Peace be upon him) was similarly attested to by various miraculous occurrences, by far the most important of all, first Revealed in the blessed month of Ramadhan through the final Messenger, is the Holy Qur'ān. The Qur'ān is for all people and is available to us in its original, living language, Arabic, which is still utilized throughout the world by millions of people. The original texts of many other religious books have been lost over time and were originally written in languages that are no longer commonly spoken.

When Muhammad (Peace be upon him) first openly proclaimed the message to the people, he met with fierce resistance. Not a single word in the Qur'ān is the word of Muhammad (Peace be upon him). Muhammad was an illiterate man. Muhammad (Peace be upon him) recited the Qur'ān while his companions, at his direction, recorded it in writing and memorized it. The Qur'ān is the direct Word of God. The Qur'ān is the only book we have today that is known to be Authored by God alone. Although there are many translations of the meaning of the Qur'ān, which are not nearly as magnificent and beautiful as the Qur'ān's plain Arabic text, there are no other versions of the Qur'ān. Here is a sample of chapter 112 of the English translation of the meaning of the Qur'ān:

"In the Name of God, The Most Gracious, The Most Merciful.

1. *Say: He is God, The One and Only;*

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14. The Qur'ān is a single book, unlike the various current versions of the Bible. Protestant Christians count 66 books in their version and Roman Catholic Christians count 72 books. There are even more books in other versions.

2. *God, The Eternal, Absolute;*
3. *He begets not, nor was He begotten;*
4. *And there is none comparable unto Him."*

God Challenges those who doubt the authenticity of the Qur'ān to produce a single chapter like unto it. This has never been accomplished though there have been many throughout history who would have loved to discredit the Qur'ān and destroy Islam. God's Challenge remains open until the Day of Judgment. One of the Qur'ān's miracles is that it is the pinnacle of literary excellence. It is the most eloquent Arabic prose in existence. It has a style like no other work in the Arabic language, a style that is inimitable. It should be pointed out that the smallest chapter of the Qur'ān is composed of just three short verses.

23. THE *SUNNAH* OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD (PEACE BE UPON HIM)

The *Sunnah*[15] refers to the sayings, actions and tacit approvals of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). Like the Qur'ān, the *Sunnah* is Inspired by Revelation from God through the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). Unlike the Qur'ān, it is not the direct, literal Word of God. The teachings were from God and the words were from Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). The *Sunnah* was also meticulously preserved.

It is obligatory for Muslims to follow the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). In the Qur'ān, God Orders the believers to Obey the Messenger (His representative). God Says: "Obey God, and Obey the Messenger." [Qur'ān 4:59]

One of the reasons that God Sent human Messengers to mankind is so they could be living, practical examples of how people should submit to God. God Says: "You have indeed in the Messenger of God a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in God and the Final Day, and who engages much in the praise of God." [Qur'ān 33:21]

24. THE STORY OF ADAM AND EVE

The story of Adam and Eve is told in the Qur'ān. Although it is similar in many ways to what is found in the surviving remnants of the previous scriptures, some important principles differ.

God Announced to the angels that He was Placing a *khalifa* (generations after generations) on earth. God Created Adam, Fashioning him from clay. He Breathed the soul into Adam, Taught him the names of things, and from him, his wife Eve was Created. God Allowed them to dwell in Paradise with free will. He Ordered the angels to bow down to Adam (in a form of respect, not worship). Satan was among the angels, though he was not one of them. He was of the *jinn*,[16] a race of beings possessing free will that God Created, before Adam, from a smokeless flame of fire. When God Ordered the assembly of angels to bow down to Adam, they all did so except Satan, who refused out of pride and arrogance, claiming to be better than Adam because he was Created from fire whereas Adam was Created from clay.

15. The reports and narrations about the *Sunnah* are known as *Hadith*, and are collected in well-known books.

16. The *jinn* were Created before Adam; they have free will. Disobedient *jinns* are demons. They live here with us in some manner by which they can see us but we cannot see them unless they choose to make themselves appear. Sorcery, which is forbidden in Islam, is also performed through them.

Satan fell from God's Grace. God Condemned him for his disobedience, but Satan asked God to Give him respite until the Day of Judgment (resurrection), so he could make Adam and his descendants unworthy. Satan said, verily I will mislead them and surely I will arouse in them vain desires. God Granted him this respite as a trial for humanity. (God Knows what Satan knows not) It is important to note that there is no way Satan could ever war with God, because, just like everything else he is God's creation. Satan exists only by God's Leave; he is completely under God's Power. If God Did Not Want Satan or his helpers to exist, they would not be able to remain in existence for even a moment.

Islam does not give Satan any share of God's Divinity. It does not attribute to him any Godlike qualities. Islam rejects the notion that Satan went to war with God and took a third of the hosts of heaven with him. Satan is an avowed enemy of humanity, but he is merely a creature, completely dependent upon God for his very existence.

Though prideful, accursed, and fallen from the Grace of God, Satan serves a purpose. God Wanted humans to have free choice between right and wrong. He Granted human beings an innate ability to recognize the Creator and turn to Him. The human being is considered to be originally good by nature, born pure in the state of Islam (submission). To mankind, Satan and his hosts order evil and oppose good, seeking to misguide his avowed enemy into evil and idolatry, away from monotheism and the Path of God. God Asks Muslims to command good and prevent evil. Because we exercise free will, by resisting the temptation of Satan, a person can attain a great level of honor.

The following was the trial of Adam and Eve in Paradise. They enjoyed perfect freedom and happiness there. God Told them to eat of the fruits of the Garden with pleasure and delight as they pleased. He Forbade them from approaching one tree, and Warned them that if they did, they will both be of the wrongdoers. Satan came and deceived them, saying that God only Forbade them from eating of that tree because it would make them immortal or they would become like the angels. They were deceived by Satan and ate of the tree.[17]

Adam and Eve felt shame. They turned to God in repentance, and God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful, All-Forgiving, Forgave them. Islam clearly rejects the notion of original sin. No one shall ever bear the burden of another (for God is The Just). Every human being is responsible for his or her actions and is born as a Muslim, pure and free from sin.

God Removed Adam and Eve from Paradise and Made them dwell on earth. God had earlier Said to the angels that He was Placing a *khalifa* (generations after generations) on earth. Earth is where God, from the time of creation, in His Timeless Knowledge, Wanted us to be.

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17. Islam does not place the blame on Eve. Both of them ate of the tree. Both of them had free will. Islam rejects the idea that women are wicked temptresses or cursed with the burden of menstruation and pain of childbirth due to the sin of Eve.

25. JESUS (PEACE BE UPON HIM)

Jesus (Peace be upon him) was a Prophet and Messenger of God. He called to the Oneness of God. He never claimed divinity for himself, **nor did he ever ask to be worshipped.**

He was born of a virgin. This was one of the many miracles of Jesus (Peace be upon him) from God. Jesus (Peace be upon him) was born without a father. God Created him as He Created everything else in existence. Jesus, Adam and Eve were all uniquely Created: Jesus (Peace be upon him) was Created without a father; Adam and Eve were Created without a father or a mother; the rest of us were all Created with a mother and a father. To believe that Jesus (Peace be upon him) is the begotten son of God gives the attribute of procreation to the Creator.[18] Muslims believe this to be polytheism and it is absolutely forbidden in Islam. Likewise, giving attributes of the Creator to His creation is also a great sin, which in Islam is clearly in opposition to monotheism. This belief is in contradiction to the teachings of all the Prophets and Messengers of God (Peace be upon them). God is beyond any creation or human attributes. Jesus (Peace be upon him) is the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed one, Sent by the Merciful God as a Prophet and Messenger.

God also Informs us that Jesus (Peace be upon him), son of Mary, is not dead, and that He Raised Jesus (Peace be upon him) up to Him. Muslims believe that the return of Jesus (Peace be upon him) will be a sign of the Last Days. When Jesus returns (Peace be upon him), he will not come in the capacity of a Prophet and Messenger to bring new Revelations. He will destroy the antichrist, who will have brought to the earth enormous trials and evil. He will follow the final manifestation of the law that Was Revealed to Muhammad (Peace be upon them both).

26. SIN AND REPENTANCE

Sin is willful and knowing disobedience to God. The greatest of all sins is polytheism, though any intentional violation of the Commandments of God is a sinful act. God has Prohibited a number of things that are harmful to the individual or to society. Murder, assault, theft, fraud, usury (See footnote 19), fornication, adultery, sorcery (See footnote 16), consumption of alcohol, eating pork, or use of illicit drugs are all examples of sinful acts.

Islam rejects the doctrine of original sin. No soul shall bear the burden of another. (This would be a great injustice; God, Most Merciful, Is Just.) Each of us is accountable before God for our own deeds. However, if one person encourages another to commit a sin, both are punishable. One of them deserves punishment for actually committing the sin, the other deserves punishment for encouraging it.

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18. It was at the First Council of Nicea (325 AD) that Jesus (Peace be upon him) was **voted** by the majority of the members to be divine rather than God's Prophet and Messenger. The concept of the trinity was established by declaring that the son was the same as and equal to God. This was in direct opposition to the Abrahamic principles of monotheism which Jesus (Peace be upon him) himself proclaimed and affirmed.
The conception of Jesus (Peace be upon him) occurred when Gabriel was ordered by God to bring Mary glad tidings of a son that would be born from her as a guide and mercy for mankind. She asked how that could be when no man had ever touched her. Gabriel answered, "If God Says, '**Be**,' it is." For this reason, Jesus, son of Mary, is at times called "Word of God." (Peace be upon him) The "Word" is God's Statement, "**Be**."
Please see topic 34: "Dangers of Innovations in Islam."

When a person commits a sin, he or she is deserving of God's Punishment. Fortunately, God is Forgiving, Most Compassionate. God Acts out of Infinite Knowledge and Justice. Muslims do not believe that Jesus, son of Mary (Peace be upon him), had to die for our sins. God, The Most Compassionate, Forgives whomever He Chooses. To believe that it was necessary for Jesus (Peace be upon him) to suffer and die in order to have our sins forgiven denies God's Infinite Power and Justice. God is Unlimited in His Mercy.

God Promises us that He Will Forgive us if we turn to Him in sincere repentance. Repentance is a serious matter. It is the way a person can attain salvation by the Grace of God. Repentance cannot be taken lightly. Sincere repentance has the following conditions:

1. The person must **recognize** and acknowledge that he or she has committed a sin and truly regret having done so.
2. The person must have a sincere **resolve** not to commit the sin again.
3. The person must humbly **turn to God for forgiveness**.
4. If the sin caused harm to someone else, the person must make every possible attempt to **remedy** the harm.

This does not mean that if the person returns to the same sin in the future, his or her former repentance is null and void. What is needed is a serious commitment in the heart not to sin again. Because we don't know what the future holds, the door to repentance is always open. God Loves the children of Adam to turn to Him for His Abundant Forgiveness. Repentance is a form of worship.

No one can forgive sins except God. It is forbidden for a Muslim to seek divine forgiveness for sin through or by turning to anyone else. Muslims believe that this is polytheism.

27. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF ISLAM

Islam places emphasis on the individual's relationship with God. The framework for this relationship follows the guidelines that are set out by the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. This relationship, in turn, defines Muslims' relationships to one another, which brings about justice, social harmony, and organization.

The Qur'ān says, "Verily the most honorable of you with God are the most pious among you." The wise, the pious, the knowledgeable in Islam, and the true in practice are Islam's natural leaders. They are commonly known as scholars.

Islam is not specific as to how one becomes a scholar. Anyone with enough intelligence, study, and determination can strive to become a scholar, but not everyone will have the time and resources to do so. All people should strive to learn as much as possible while recognizing that God is the One Who Bestows Knowledge and Understanding.

The scholar plays a critical role in Muslim society. He or she devotes years to the study of Islam. Scholars cannot forgive sins, bless people, or change the law of God. They can only impart the information they have acquired by reference to the Qur'ān and *Sunnah,* and, by the nobility of their character (which is an inevitable part of true knowledge and wisdom, as well as a measure of it), inspiring others to be better.

Some have used the word cleric to describe a Muslim scholar. This is a misnomer. There is no formal clergy and no ordaining body. The relationship between the

individual and God is a direct one. No one besides God can declare what is lawful and what is sinful. No created being can bless another. Each individual is directly accountable to his or her Lord and Creator.

One visiting a mosque may see a person leading the congregational prayers. Whenever Muslims pray together, they must select one individual to stand in front and lead the others in prayer, so that all might pray in unity and harmony. It is best to select the person most knowledgeable in Islam. This person is called the *imām*, which literally means "the one who is leading." At midday, on Fridays, there is a special congregational prayer. All Muslim men are required to attend; it is voluntary for women. This weekly prayer is preceded by a short sermon. The one to give this sermon should be the best available in terms of his deep understanding of Islamic principles.

28. **ISLAMIC LAW**

Islamic law is only derived from the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). Islamic law covers all aspects of life. It deals with how to worship God and how to deal with others. God Commands the believers to do certain things and Bans them from doing others. God alone Has the Right to Make some things lawful and other things sinful and forbidden. An Islamic society can legislate any laws for the improvement of life (e.g. traffic laws), as long as they are not in contradiction to Islamic law. God Encourages some things without Commanding them and Discourages some behaviors without Prohibiting them outright. All of these injunctions, taken together, form the law of Islam. When we add the fact that there are issues on which Islamic law takes no position, this makes a total of five possible rulings for every human action:

1.) Obligatory, 2.) Encouraged, 3.) Neutral, 4.) Discouraged and 5.) Forbidden.

Islamic law is of Divine Origin. The reason we obey these laws is because God Commands us to do so. We are encouraged to understand the wisdom behind the law, yet we are expected to obey even when we do not fully understand why. Understanding is an added gift. For example, eating pork is forbidden because God Said so. We refrain from eating it for that reason, and not because we also happen to know scientifically that it contains unique diseases and is the least healthy meat. Even if scientists were able to genetically breed pigs to be a disease-free, most nutritious food, it would still be forbidden to eat pork. (However, someone may eat pork to preserve his or her life if there are no other options left, and there would be no sin in doing so.)

The sources of Islamic law are the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. God Considers it polytheism to allow a religious leader to change God's Command by making lawful what God has Made forbidden or by making forbidden what God has Made lawful.[19] In this world, God alone Determines what is good and what is sinful. In the Hereafter, God alone Has the Power and Wisdom to Reward those who do good and Punish those who do evil.

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19. Charging any amount of **interest** on a loan, or usury, was originally forbidden in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. However, Christians in Europe from the time of the Middle Ages slowly changed this prohibition. Today, even all "Islamic countries" have allowed this gross violation of God's Law.

29. **THE ISLAMIC DRESS CODE**

Islam promotes modesty and seeks to minimize vice and immorality in society. One of the ways it does so is by requiring modest dress. Islam sets the standards of decency for both men and women.

In most Western countries, there are laws defining what is decent. This usually amounts to the male having to cover his genitals and the female having to cover her genitals and her breasts. If this minimum requirement is not met, the most the person can be charged with is indecent exposure. The reason cited for the difference between men and women in this matter is the difference in their anatomies.

Islam prescribes a more conservative minimum dress code for both men and women. A man must always be covered in loose and unrevealing clothing between his navel and his knee. This is the absolute minimum covering required. He must never, for example, go out in public wearing a short bathing suit. A woman must cover everything but her face and hands, and obscure the details of her body from the public. The wisdom behind this dress code is to minimize sexual enticement as much as possible for both men and women. Obeying this dress code is a form of obedience to God.

Some Western observers have assumed that the head covering of a woman is meant to show her inferiority to men. This could not be further from the truth. In Islam, a woman that dresses this way commands respect and through her modesty rejects sexual servitude. The message that the woman gives when she wears Islamic dress is as follows: “Respect me for who I am. I am not a sex object.”

The trials that befall a society that allows women and men to mingle freely, display themselves, and compete through sexual attraction, are significant and cannot be ignored. To make women into sex objects for the pleasure of men is not liberation. In fact, it is a dehumanizing form of oppression rejected by Islam. The liberation of the Muslim woman is that she is recognized by the content of her character rather than by the display of her physical attributes. From the Islamic point of view, Western “liberated” women who must constantly worry about their looks, figure, and youth for the pleasure of others are trapped in a form of slavery.

30. **WOMEN IN ISLAM**

Women and men are equal before God. They are both accountable before God. They equally receive their reward in the hereafter for their faith and good deeds.

Islam sees every woman, married or unmarried, as an individual in her own right. She has the same right to own property, earn wealth, and spend it as a man has. Her wealth does not become the property of her husband after marriage. A woman has the right to choose whom she marries and, when married, does not change her last name out of respect for her lineage. A woman can seek divorce if her marriage does not work out.

Economically, each man and woman is an independent legal entity. Men and women have the right to own their individual property, engage in business, and inherit from others. Both have the equal right to receive an education and enter into gainful employment, as long as the guidelines of Islam are followed.

Seeking knowledge is the obligation of every Muslim, male or female. The type of knowledge that is most emphasized is religious knowledge. It is also required within a society to have professionals of both genders available for the benefit of the public. For

example, society requires doctors, teachers, counselors, social workers, and many other important vocations. When there is a shortage of qualified personnel, it may become obligatory for women or men to gain expertise in these fields to fulfill the needs of the Muslim community. In this situation, the guidelines of Islam must be upheld.

Women are encouraged to seek Islamic knowledge, pursue their academic endeavors within the framework of Islam, and strive to fulfill their intellectual curiosity. To prevent anyone from getting an education is contrary to the teachings of Islam.

Men are responsible for maintaining and protecting the family, and providing the basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter for their wife, children, and if needed, other female relatives in the household. Women are not primarily responsible for this, even if married.

31. MALE CHAUVINISM AND THE MUSLIM WORLD

Many people perceive Islam as a chauvinistic religion that belittles women. They cite the condition of women in some "Muslim countries"[20] to prove their point. Their mistake is that they fail to separate the culture of a given people from the true teachings of the religion that they may profess. It is appalling that today the oppression of women still exists in many cultures around the world. Women in many Third World countries live horrible lives. They are dominated by men and denied many of their basic human rights. This does not apply to Muslim countries alone, nor does it apply to all Muslim countries. Islam clearly condemns this oppression. It is a tragic injustice to blame these cultural practices on religious beliefs when the teachings of the religion do not call for such behavior. The teachings of Islam clearly forbid the oppression of women.

Oppressive practices against women that exist in certain parts of the world have, unfortunately and mistakenly, been associated by some people with Islam. One of these is the ancient pagan custom of female genital mutilation, sometimes mistakenly called "female circumcision," which originated and is still practiced in the Nile River Valley and surrounding areas. It is practiced there by a number of ethnic groups of a wide variety of faiths. Many women in Africa are victims of this horrible, dismembering, barbaric custom. In Kenya, for example, one group of people who do **not** practice female genital mutilation are the Muslims.

Female genital mutilation is an abomination and is absolutely forbidden in Islam. It is most unfortunate that, even though Islam forbids it, certain ethnic groups have perpetuated this practice even after their conversion to Islam, leading some to think that it is a part of Islam. Today, as these people become more knowledgeable about Islam, they are abandoning this cruel pagan practice.

Male circumcision is an Islamic practice and in fact was taught by God's Prophets and Messengers including the Prophet Abraham (Peace be upon him).

Another horrible practice is that of honor killing, where a man kills a female relative in his family because he feels disgraced by her behavior. We hear of cases where a brother has killed his sister simply because she refused to marry the person that her family arranged for her. This is outright murder in Islam. It is not permissible

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20. Unfortunately, an "Islamic country," does not necessarily mean that the country's government or the people are following Islamic Law (Shari'a).

for a person to kill anyone out of some notion of "honor." This conduct, though not common, is practiced by certain groups of people in the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, and other places. It is by no means exclusive to "Islamic countries," and it violates Islamic law.

Unfortunately, forced marriage is practiced in many traditional societies. It is another practice that is forbidden in Islam. Some fathers had forced their daughters into marriage at the time of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). When the women complained to him of this, he nullified their marriages or gave them the option of ending the marriage even if it had already been consummated, establishing the clear precedent for Islamic law concerning freedom of choice about marriage and putting an end to this oppressive practice. Sadly, this still goes on in many parts of the world today, including a number of "Islamic countries." Though the practice is illegal in almost all countries, many women in traditional societies either do not know their rights or are too afraid to demand them.

All of these practices are against Islamic law, and it is the responsibility of all Muslims to eradicate them in their societies. Yes, Islam is tolerant of cultural diversity and does not believe in eradicating the ways of life for different people, nor does it force people to give up their cultural identity when they embrace Islam. However, when the cultural practices of a people contravene the laws of Islam and deprive people of their God-Given, inalienable rights and freedom of choice, it becomes a religious obligation to abandon them.

32. **ISLAM, WARFARE, AND *JIHĀD***

The Qur'ān makes it clear that it is permissible for people to fight back against those who attack them. God Says: "Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for God Loves not transgressors." [Qur'ān 2:190]

God Says: "And why should you not fight in the cause of God and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated (and oppressed)? Men, women, and children, whose cry is: 'Our Lord! Rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors, and raise for us from You one who will protect; and raise for us from You one who will help'." [Qur'ān 4:75]

The Qur'ān also makes it clear that when the other party refrains from aggression, then it is not permissible to attack them. God Says: "But if they cease, God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression and there prevail justice and faith in God. But if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression." [Qur'ān 2:192-193]

It is permissible to fight against oppression and persecution. This does not apply only to Islam and Muslims, because everyone has the right to worship God. God Says: "To those against whom war is made, permission is given [to fight] because they are wronged and verily God is Most Powerful for their aid. [They are] those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right [for no cause] except that they say, 'Our Lord is God.' If God did not Check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of God is commemorated in abundant measure…" [Qur'ān 22:39-40] This clearly means that Muslims must fight to protect and defend people of other faiths if they are in areas where the Muslims have effective power. All people must be

free to worship God according to their own beliefs. **They must be free to make their own choices**. God explicitly says: "**There is no compulsion in religion**." [Qur'ān 2: 256]

This brings us to the concept of *jihād*. The word ***jihād*** **literally means struggle** and applies to any colossal effort, not just to warfare. *Jihād* may even be to refrain from fighting or to resist one's own desires or evil inclinations. There is no such thing as "holy war" in Islam. This is a mistranslation of the word. Holy war is carried out to forcibly subject others to one's religious beliefs. This is expressly forbidden in Islam.

Fighting in war can be *jihād*, but under what conditions? Muslims fight in defense, but so do others. What makes such fighting a *jihād*? The answer is that fighting only becomes *jihād* if it is for the sake of being obedient to God and in accordance with His Divine law. Even fighting against people who attacked first would not be *jihād* if the Muslims strike back in revenge. It is not *jihād* to fight for wealth, nationalism, territory, honor, race, etc. *Jihād* has a strong element of self-restraint not seen in any other forms of warfare.

In the life of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), we have a practical example of how Islamic warfare, or *jihād*, is to be carried out. When Muhammad (Peace be upon him) began calling the people of Makka to Islam, he was strongly opposed. He was severely persecuted along with his followers. Some of them were tortured because of their belief and even killed. The situation grew progressively worse until the Muslims were forced to flee. They were openly invited to emigrate to Medina, a city to the north, some of whose inhabitants had accepted Islam. In Medina, the Islamic community was established, and from there Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) continued his mission of calling the people to Islam.

The Makkans were intent on stopping Muhammad (Peace be upon him) and putting an end to Islam and its monotheism. On many occasions they attacked Medina, and the Muslims had to fight back in defense. During these battles we can see how fighting in Islam was conducted.

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) forbade the killing of non-combatants. Ibn `Umar, a companion of the Prophet (Peace be upon him), said: "I saw the body of a slain woman during one of the battles of the Prophet (Peace be upon him), so he forbade the killing of women and children." [*Būkhārī* and *Muslim*]

Rabāh b. Rabī` was another companion of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). He gave the following account of an incident that occurred during one of the battles: "We were with God's Messenger [Peace be upon him] during a battle and we saw people gathered together. He dispatched a man to find out why they were gathered. The man returned and said: 'They are gathered around a slain woman.' So God's Messenger [Peace be upon him] said: 'She should not have been attacked!' Khālid b. al-Walīd was leading the forces, so he dispatched a man to him saying: 'Tell Khālid not to kill women or laborers.'" [*Sunan Abī Dāwūd*]

God's Messenger (Peace be upon him) used to say the following words to his troops before sending them to war: "Go forward in the name of God. Do not kill an elderly person, nor a child, nor a woman, and do not exceed the bounds." [*Muwatta'*]

From all this, it is easy to see the position of Islam on terrorism. Terrorism is a form of warfare in which innocent people are specifically targeted in order to instill fear in a society. It is clear from the preceding that even during war, when the Muslims

are fighting an aggressive enemy, they are never allowed to target civilians. This is strictly prohibited by Islamic law and the clear examples of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). The killing of innocents is murder and a crime against humanity, **even during times of war and even when the other side does not similarly respect civilian life**. One who intentionally kills innocent people is a murderer who deserves the punishment for murder. Terrorism is categorically prohibited in Islam and Islamic law rejects the premise that a non-legitimate tactic can EVER lead to a positive result.

Throughout Islamic history, the Muslims' treatment of others in times of war has been exemplary. Abū Bakr, a companion of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) and the first Caliph that came after him, sent an army to Syria to fight the aggressive Roman legions and went out to give them words of encouragement. He said: "You are going to find a group of people who have devoted themselves to the worship of God (i.e., monks), so leave them to what they are doing."

When `Umar, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) and the second Caliph, drove the Roman legions out of Jerusalem, the Muslims were welcomed as liberators. Even though the Muslims had conquered the land, they were not allowed to look upon the inhabitants of the land as their enemies. Their enemies were only the Roman legions who had aggressed against them. When `Umar entered Jerusalem as a conqueror, he came humbly. Instead of dictating harsh terms to the people, he brought a treaty that guaranteed the people of Jerusalem, who were predominantly Christian, their safety and freedom from all persecution. The following is from the treaty that he drafted for them:

"This is what `Umar, the commander of the faithful, grants to the people in peace. He grants them the safety of their persons, their churches, and their crosses… their churches will not be shut down nor destroyed. Nothing will be taken from them or from their crosses. They will not be compelled to abandon their faith nor shall any one of them be abused."

There is no such thing as a "holy war" in Islam. Muslims are not allowed to force their religion on anyone. The word *jihād* means "struggle." This struggle can be of a military nature. When it is, the difference between a *jihād* and a normal war becomes clear. *Jihād* can never be fought for worldly gain, for conquest, or even for revenge. War must only be fought to protect the lives, property, and freedoms of people. Muslims must fight to protect the freedom of the people to worship God when that freedom is forcibly attacked. They are never allowed to attack innocent people, even when they are themselves attacked.

Any people that go against this established principle of Islamic law are fighting in contradiction to Islamic principles. It is ludicrous for them to call this fighting a *jihād*, a word that means striving for the cause of Islam. In general, they are murderers in the light of Islamic law and should be treated as such.

33. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

One of the hallmarks of Islam is its complete harmony with science. A Muslim considers conflict between scientific facts and religion to be impossible. Religion comes from God and so does the creation. It is impossible for one to contradict the other.

Muslims expect causes for everything in creation. God Created us and all that we see. A Muslim assumes that everything in creation has a natural explanation, from the formation of the stars and galaxies to the origin and diversity of different species. A Muslim should never rely on miracles to explain natural phenomena. A Muslim believes that miracles are instances where God Contravenes the natural laws for a specific reason, such as to Assist one of His Prophets or to Answer a prayer. Miraculous explanations should never be formed in order to explain something in the natural world or to cover up for human ignorance on a scientific matter.

There has never been a scientific fact or a valid scientific theory that contradicted the teachings of Islam. Whatever science uncovers, it only increases our knowledge of God's magnificent creation. This is why Islam actively encourages scientific endeavors, and why the Qur'ān commands us to study God's Signs in nature.

Islam also allows us to enjoy the fruits of human ingenuity. We are encouraged to strive to better the world. Islam welcomes technological advances. Technology can be employed for good and evil. Technology itself is neutral. It is our responsibility to use what God has Blessed us to know for the betterment of humanity.

In the early days of Islam, when people adhered to its beliefs and practices, there was a flowering of science, culture, trade and technology. The teachings of Islam brought about this scientific awareness, which eventually ignited and propelled the European Renaissance. It was only after people began deviating from the original Islamic principles and religious beliefs that the advancements and scientific achievements of the Muslim world began to cease and fall into obscurity.

34. **THE DANGERS OF INNOVATIONS IN ISLAM** *(BID'AH)*

Innovations in matters of religion and worship within Islam are considered to be contamination, error, and deviation. Earlier heinous diversions from monotheism, such as worshipping creation, resulted in condemnation by God. (However, as noted above, innovations in other matters, such as science and technology, to improve life, are greatly encouraged.)

God, Most Compassionate, has Told us through His last Prophet Muhammad, when Muhammad (Peace be upon him) was nearing the end of his life, that He had Completed the religion of Islam. Muslims must recognize that any change in matters of worship is strictly forbidden. No change could ever add anything positive and would only contribute to the degradation of the complete and perfect religion ordained by God. All innovations in matters of religion lead to straying, and all straying leads to hellfire. Mankind must not allow any deviation (addition or deletion), even as small as one degree, in matters of worship.[21] If changes are allowed, those deviations will be compounded by future generations, and the result will not be Islam as it was Perfected by God.

The changing of God's laws is forbidden in Islam. God Condemns religious leaders who alter Divine principles. One who attempts to make changes places him or herself on the same level with God, committing polytheism. An example of this would be to make the killing of innocents lawful. God's laws are perfect and do not need to

21. Islam teaches that for an act of worship to be accepted by God it must fulfill two conditions: The intention must be **only to please God,** and the act must be done **according to the *Sunnah*** of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him).

be "modernized" by anyone. God Allows us the freedom to obey or disobey Him by choosing to follow His Faith or to follow our own desires. However, He Forbids us to change His Religious Principles.

(It is interesting to note that the crescent moon is not representative of the religion of Islam, as Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) never used or mentioned it. It was a pagan symbol and an innovation brought about by later generations as a political symbol. Sadly, it is commonly adopted and mistaken as the Islamic symbol.)

35. **FUNDAMENTALISM AND TERRORISM**

Fundamentalism comes from the root word *fundare,* which means a base or foundation. The definition of fundamentalism in reference to religion is "religious beliefs based on a literal interpretation of a religious text."

If you ask a Westerner, "What is the first image that comes to mind when you hear the word 'Muslim'?" many answer, "Terrorist." This may be due to the fact that the word Muslim is often paired with the word terrorist in the media. If a Jew or a Christian were to take part in an act that would be clearly considered terrorism, one would not hear them called "Christian terrorist" or "Jewish terrorist." Just as Jim Jones, who claimed to represent Christ, and Timothy McVeigh, who professed to be a part of the Christian Patriot Movement, are not considered representative of Christianity, terrorists should not be considered representatives of Islam.

Two phrases often used interchangeably are "Muslim terrorist" and "Muslim fundamentalist." ("Muslim terrorist" is an oxymoron; **one who truly practices Islam cannot be a terrorist.**) If we were to refer to the definition of fundamentalism, we would know that these phrases are mistakenly being used interchangeably, and that they actually have opposite meanings. A true Islamic fundamentalist is one who strictly adheres to the fundamentals of Islam, which can only be defined by the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). This is the opposite of what people commonly call "Islamic fundamentalism." Within true Islamic fundamentalism one would never see crimes against humanity, heinous acts of hatred, political killing, terrorism, oppression, religious extremism or zealotry, or the forcing of one's religion on others. All of these acts are clearly forbidden in Islam. Muhammad (Peace be upon him) was a pinnacle of humanity's generosity and compassion.

The media spotlight is on those dramatic, oppressive, ignorant murderers who are not true Muslim fundamentalists according to its correct definition. It is a tragedy that many people have an enormous unfounded fear of Islam and what is mistakenly thought to be Islam's fundamental beliefs. Since the time of the Crusades, some Westerners have taken a hostile, aggressive, and demonizing stance toward Islam.

I am saddened when I read newspaper articles or hear broadcast reports which take quotations from the Qur'an out of context to create fear or divisiveness.[22] Misrepresenting or twisting any religious text is despicable, whether it is done by "Muslim" terrorists or "evangelists." Fearmongers who misrepresent religious principles to create alienation and hate are a type of terrorist. Terrorism can be

22. In Matthew 10:34, Jesus (Peace be upon him) is quoted as saying, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword." This illustrates the danger of taking a quotation out of context without understanding the broader, noble, and beautiful message of Jesus (Peace be upon him). Those who wish to defame any religion by cutting, pasting, and twisting any religious texts, sadly, may achieve their evil purpose.

emotional or psychological as well as physical. It is the duty of all people who wish to counter any kind of terrorism to at least become informed about each other's beliefs.

Unfortunately, polarizing propaganda has been relentlessly spun into today's sensationalism, unjustly fueled by the fear of this "unknown and strange" faith. Alienation is escalating. It often seems that all governments need enemies to fuel the military and to bring about national unity. During the Cold War, our enemy was "Communism." Today, Muslims are finding themselves in the crosshairs.

Unfortunately, across the globe Muslims practicing true Islamic principles are an endangered species. As Muslims struggle to practice their beliefs, many are challenged by either their own government or Western governments. The corporate media spotlight is not shining on the true Islamic fundamentalists.

Pressure Cooker: There are people living under great oppression. Their future looks hopeless as their families and homes are being crushed by humiliating injustice and violence. When such conditions are ignored or viewed with callous indifference by the rest of the world, it can and does produce a desperate rage that transcends religion and culture. These are the conditions in which many Muslims find themselves today. Lacking hope and having lost patience with the dysfunctional options placed before them, they seek justice, and we are seeing more and more of them willing to take extreme measures, to react in violent ways, even to kill themselves in order to deliver a militant or political act of defiance. Those living in the Muslim world who are in this "pressure cooker" of oppression may seek any religious or non-religious justification for their extreme and violent actions. If they look long enough, they sometimes find what they are looking for, as there are extreme minded people in every religion who do not represent the commonly practiced tenets of the faith.

36. **CONCLUSION**

Islam is a greatly misunderstood and misrepresented religion. **Islam means to submit one's will to God**. It is the way of life for anyone who chooses to accept that **there is One God only, and none is worthy of worship but Him**. This world is temporary and no more than a trial for us, after which we will all die. The life of the hereafter is forever.

God, for the guidance of mankind, Sent us Prophets: Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, all Prophets of Islam (Peace be upon them). God Chose Muhammad (Peace be upon him) as His final Prophet and Honored him with the privilege of Revealing the Qur'ān through him. The Qur'ān is the Direct Word of God, not the word of Muhammad (Peace be upon him), who was an illiterate man. God has Preserved the Qur'ān with its teachings for us all.

The five fundamental acts of worship for Muslims are:

1. To "**Testify that there is no deity except God, and that Muhammad is His Messenger"**
2. To **pray** five times a day
3. To Pay the yearly **Alms**
4. To **Fast** during Ramadhan
5. To Make a **pilgrimage** to Makka

It is imperative to understand *jihād*: *jihād* is a struggle for the cause of God alone and must never violate Islamic principles. Terrorism is clearly rejected by Islam and can

never be called *jihād*. God States that there is no compulsion in religion. Human rights and freedom of choice are sacred. In Islam, the woman plays a very important role. Women are equal to and required to be honored by men.

God Mentions in the Qur'ān that He has Perfected Islam as a religion for all of mankind, thus Completing His Favor upon us. God has Prepared for us the light of Islam as a guide for humanity's return to Him.

Life is short and precious; it is a tragedy to waste it piling up temporal material gain while ignoring the **true purpose of creation: to worship none but God**. Many of us believe and pay insurance salespeople who tell us that it is in our best interest to insure our houses for the very remote chance that our house may catch fire. How many of us believe the Prophets and Messengers of God (Peace be upon them) who have all promised us eternal life after death? How many of us worship none but God and do what He Asks of us? Do insurance salespeople have more credibility with us than God and all of His Prophets and Messengers? Many people spend their precious lives accumulating temporal material wealth for their own use or to pass on to the next generation. Through Islam, God Invites us to turn to that which is everlasting, eternal.

On the Day of Judgment, we will be responsible for what we know and how we have applied it. We will be asked about our worship. Now is the time for us to create that answer.

37. **EDITOR'S NOTE**

We are told by scientists that space contains over one hundred billion galaxies. We know that every one of us was Created from a single cell. When I think about this, I can't help but be humbled and realize our extreme insignificance in the light of God's Amazing Splendor.

Satan swore to deceive mankind, to bring us misunderstanding, animosity, hatred, and war. To do my part, in opposing Satan, my motives are to please my Lord by **promoting peace through understanding.** It is paramount that humanity understand Islam. This book is based on the lectures I've been giving on Islam for the past two decades. It would not have been possible without Allah's Grace and the help and assistance of my brothers and sisters. I thank you, my readers, for your time and interest in understanding Islam, the faith of one-fifth of the world's population. I invite you to send me your feedback and comments to www.islam-is.com for consideration in this ongoing work. I invite you to share any or all parts of this material. I ask only that you do not quote the information out of context.

Please forgive me if in this work I have offended anyone. Because of my passion for Islam, I express my beliefs strongly. I also value individual choice and respect differences. But because I believe understanding is the way to peace, and because in the West Islam is often perceived as a religion of narrow-minded zealots out to convert the world by force, I felt it was important to express my beliefs in a clear and unambiguous language to help correct misconceptions.

May God Bless you, the reader, and all those who have assisted in bringing about this work. If I have said anything correct, it is by Allah's Mercy, and if I have said anything wrong, it is my error. Allah and His Messenger are free from any error.

"Oh, Creator of all, Protect us from all evil and Guide us to the Truth."

Peace be upon you, *Pete Seda*